

## A PROBE INTO COMPREHENSION AND USE OF ASSESSMENT BY SECONDARY EFL TEACHERS IN CHINA

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to explore Chinese secondary EFL teachers' comprehension and use of assessment, including formative assessment (FA) and summative assessment (SA). Assessment has a great impact on students' learning. The role of FA for improving learning has been well documented (Black & Wiliam, 1998, Hattie & Timperley, 2007, Shute, 2008; Wiliam et al., 2004) and teachers' summative assessment practices also have the potential to positively influence students and teachers (Biggs, 1998; McMillan, 2003). Thanks to its value for learning and teaching, assessment has been emphasized in many national educational documents in China such as National English Curriculum Standards (MoE, 2001 & 2011). Yet little researches have been done so far to investigate how secondary EFL teachers in China understand and implement FA and SA. This study, via a qualitative and quantitative analysis of questionnaire questions, reveals some specific patterns in teachers' understanding and application of assessment: their consistency and inconsistency with the discourse of mainstream assessment literature. The findings are expected to provide implication for development of professional teacher preparation program and teachers' self-reflection.

**Keywords:** *formative assessment, summative assessment, secondary EFL teachers*

### INTRODUCTION

Assessment, a natural and automatic activity, permeates every aspect of our lives (Rowntree, 1987). It can be argued that assessment is one of the basic skills for survival: judgments enable an understanding of our environment, what we do, how we do it and how we can change and/or improve what we do (Taras, 2012). When it comes to the context of education, its value and significance has been increasingly recognized and stressed. It is estimated that teachers spend one thirds or half of their time doing assessment-related work (Stiggins, 1991 & 1999) and it is believed that what teachers assess and how and why they assess sends a clear message to students about what is worth learning, how it should be learned and how well they are expected to learn it (Moss,

2013). What's more, teacher assessment, whether summative or formative, takes places on a daily and on-going basis in the form of classroom tests, quizzes, questioning, papers, projects, and other measures, constituting a key part of students' learning experience. Thus, it can be argued that assessment is the most powerful type of measurement in education that influences student learning (Shepard, 2013).

Because of the above-mentioned impacts, assessment has been written into many national educational policies of EFL in China such as National English Curriculum Standards (MoE, 2001 & 2011), National English Curriculum Standards for Senior High School (MoE, 2003) and College English Curriculum Requirements (CECR) (MoE, 2004 & 2007). Thanks to this policy promotion,

a lot of efforts have been invested into research and education regarding assessment with a view to improving assessment quality and therefore education quality at large (Huang & Luo, 2014; Lin & Gao, 2011). One of the agreed findings is that teachers don't do assessment well because of their poor assessment literacy.

As quality of assessment depends to a large extent on teachers' assessment knowledge and skills, it is very significant to help teacher improve their assessment ability. To achieve this, the first step is for us to be informed about the current status of teachers' assessment literacy. Unless we better understand teachers' strengths and weaknesses to use evidence of student learning to support instruction and learning, professional development specialists and researchers will be unable to determine optimal methods of supporting teachers in this endeavor (Schneider, Egan & Julian, 2013). But as for where exactly the teachers are in their mastery of assessment knowledge and skills, there have been few empirical researches. So far we know little about how secondary EFL teachers in China conceptualize and implement assessment, which makes a sound teacher development program in this regard impossible.

Given this situation, this study attempts to investigate how secondary EFL teachers in China understand and use assessment (FA and SA). which is expected to contribute to the knowledge base for further efforts to enhance teachers' assessment competence.

## METHOD

Questionnaire data was collected in Beijing Normal University in 2013. The questionnaire is a further development on questionnaire on Summative and Formative Assessment (Taras, 2008). The further development includes addition of items absent in Taras' version

such as students peer assessment, deletion of items not relevant for purpose of this study such as relation between theory and practice as well as modification of questionnaire layout. The final questionnaire of this study is composed of two parts: open-question part and close-question part. The 5 open questions are aimed at investigating teachers' understanding of FA and SA while close-question part, made up of 34 Yes or No questions, is targeted at examining teachers' use of FA and SA. After a pilot study of the questionnaire among three university teachers and small modification of the layout and wording, the questionnaire was given to the 98 participants. A combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis of the responses is used to give a comparatively more accurate picture of participants' understanding and use of assessment than qualitative or quantitative analysis alone.

The participants were 37 EFL secondary teachers pursuing M. Ed. degree in Beijing Normal University and 61 EFL teachers attending a short-term workshop there. Participants of two different educational backgrounds were selected in the hope that the findings could be more representative rather than reflecting the specific situation of a particular sub-group.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the question *of How do secondary teachers in Chinese EFL classroom understand assessment: FA and SA*, teachers' responses to the 5 open questions are analyzed in a qualitative way in terms of six dimensions: Agent, Construct, Timing, Instrument, Use and Relation between FA and SA. The first five dimensions are selected as the unit of qualitative analysis because they are basic elements involved in description of assessment process: Agent refers to who are doing the assessment; construct what

is to be assessed; Timing when FA takes places; Instrument the tools used for assessment; use how assessment results are dealt with for various purposes. The sixth dimension (relation between FA and SA) is added because of its essential role in conceptualization of FA and SA and its controversial nature in assessment literature.

### *Agent of Assessment*

**FA:** Most of the participants regard teachers as the major agent of FA. 89 participants stated clearly or implied that FA should be carried out by teachers. Only nine participants mentioned student's involvement in the process of FA via either self-assessment or self-reflection. Of these nine participants, one claimed that FA could be conducted by students, teachers or even parents. In other words, in the eyes of most of the participants, students are only the objects to be assessed in the FA process, serving as source of information to be used by teachers for instructional adjustment. Most participants fail to realize that in addition to adjustment of instruction, teachers ought to help students become assessors of their own learning (Sadler, 1989; Stiggins, 2010).

Although there are some scholars emphasizing teachers as the agent of FA (Kahl, 2005; Stiggins, 2002; Tunstall & Gipps 1996), there has been an increasing consensus in dominant FA literature that FA should be carried out by both teachers and students (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Black & Wiliam 1998; Black et al, 2003; Perie, Marion, Gong, & Wurtzel, 2007). While Rea-Dickins (2001) believes that FA may be taken by any of the key stakeholders in the assessment process, for example, a teacher, a learner or a school, recent years have seen more and more stress on active role of students in the process of FA as self-regulating theories are gaining momentum (Andrade, 2010).

**SA:** Similar to FA, an over-welcoming majority of the participants think that SA should be conducted by teachers, implicitly or explicitly. Most of definitions implied that teachers should be agent of SA. There is one participant who explicitly stated: "SA refers to the objective assessment conducted by teachers of students' performance or achievement at the end of a certain period of learning." Another participant emphasized teachers as the developer of assessment task: "SA is the evaluation of students' task performance after students completing the task designed by teachers." Only two of the 98 participants mentioned students as agent of SA. In describing SA, one participant said that the students were asked to peer review essay for each other and the other articulated that SA should be based on end-semester, student regular performance and student-self assessment.

An examination of SA definitions in assessment literature shows that there is few explicit mentioning of agents (neither teachers nor students). It is probably because it is not important who conduct SA or it is self-evident that teachers should be main agent of assessment in the eyes of the participants. The latter assumption can find its support in the various specification or standards of teacher competences in educational assessment where teachers' role in the whole SA process is clearly articulated (e.g. AFT, NCME, & NEA, 1990). In general, teacher's understanding of SA agent is in line with existing literature.

### **Construct of assessment**

**FA:** Construct is concerned with what is to be assessed. The construct of FA is understood by the participants in the following ways: (1) the participants tend to believe that the FA has a wider construct than SA. According to the

participants, students are to be assessed on their learning achievement, attitudes towards learning, attendances, morality, learning strategies, affects in FA while to be tested only on their learning gains in SA; (2) some participants think that FA refers to the assessment of teachers' instruction instead of students' learning; and (3) FA focuses on smaller learning targets, or each step of completing a specific task.

The first two ways of understanding is inconsistent with the discourse in assessment literature. While the participants would like to assess a list of things when it comes to FA, it is almost always students' learning that is clearly expressed as construct of FA in assessment literature. Teachers' instruction is not what is assessed in FA. The relation among students learning, teacher instruction and FA can be simply put like this: FA takes place as students' learning is assessed during instruction to provide information for teachers to adjust their instruction and for students to regulate their learning for the final purpose of improving students' learning. In other words, FA assesses students learning (either process or product) instead of teachers' instruction, though teachers' instruction might be improved as the result of FA. However, the third way is justified for it is echoed by Harlen and James (1997) who emphasized that FA was concerned about the small ideas and skills that could be developed in specific classroom activities.

**SA:** A close examination of participants' responses reveals a division that figures quite prominently on the construct of SA: Whether SA is focused on teacher instruction or student learning. Although it was either implied or clearly stated by most participants that SA should be aimed at assessing students learning or learning outcome, there are 26 participants who explicitly emphasized that the focus of SA should

be on teacher instruction or teaching effect. A representative definition of SA is: "SA is an assessment of the outcome of instruction, which is aimed at evaluating the effect of teaching at the end of instructional activity." Such a view might reflect to some extent teachers' concern about their teaching quality as judged by assessment activities. Just as one participant explicitly pointed out: "SA is made at the end of class for the purpose of future instruction." In addition to this major disagreement among participants, there is a participant who holds that SA is assessing not only cognitive achievement but also students' behavior. There is another one believing that SA is the assessment of the whole learning process at the end of instruction and two participants defined SA as assessment on education quality of a discipline or a school, which kind of equals assessment with evaluation.

The view of objects of SA as teacher instruction, student behavior, the whole learning process and education quality of discipline or school deviates from what the assessment literature says about the construct of SA. Like FA, SA is aimed at judging students learning outcome. It is pointed out by Harlen (2004) that unlike assessments that are formative or diagnostic, the purpose of summative assessment is to determine the students' overall achievement, in a specific area of learning at a particular time – a purpose that distinguishes it from all other forms of assessments. From this it can be seen that SA is not only aimed at assessing cognitive achievement, but more importantly at overall achievement, similar to big targets or big ideas (Harlen & James, 1997), which distinguishes SA from FA in terms of construct. Unfortunately this difference doesn't stand out in the participants' responses.



### *Timing of assessment*

**FA:** It is universally acknowledged among participants that FA takes place in the process of teaching or learning. But they seem divided on how frequently FA should be carried out. The time interval ranges from “minute by minute” to “on semester basis”. 19 participants explicitly mentioned the word “periodical”. 15 participants used such words as weekly, end of unit, quiz, monthly test, mid-semester test and end of semester to express the specific frequency. There are also some participants holding that FA takes place on the minute by minute and day by day basis. They didn’t use the exact wording but 23 participants mentioned that FA happened during the completion of a specific task, or during classroom instruction or at the end of a specific class. In addition to the 23 participants, five participants said that the assessment should be conducted in a timely or prompt way. The rest of participants did not talk about the specific time for implementing FA but all mentioned that it happened in the process of teaching or learning.

According to the participants’ responses, timing seems to be an inevitable part in their conceptualization of FA. The participants tend to take timing of assessment as one of the distinguishing features of FA. This is in line with many definitions of FA in assessment literature where FA is specified as taking place during the instruction or in the process of leaning (Bloom, Hastings, & Madaus, 1971; MoE, 1994; Scriven, 1967). However, there have been different views regarding the role of timing in conceptualization of FA. Sadler (1989 & 1998) thinks that it is feedback not timing that distinguishes FA from SA. In the recent authoritative definitions of FA (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Wiliam 2011), timing is absent and therefore can’t be held as a factor that

determines whether an assessment is formative or not.

**SA:** The participants’ pattern of understanding regarding time of SA is quite similar to the pattern for FA. There is a universal agreement among participants that SA takes place at the end of instruction as compared to FA happening in the process of instruction. However, the range of the period is quite wide too, varying from participant to participant. It can extend from the length of a classroom instructional activity to the whole three years of senior high school learning culminating at *Gaokao of English* (National Matriculation English Test). It seems that majority of participants think that SA takes place in the middle of semester, at end of semester or at the end of one year. In addition to the majority, there are some participants stressing the end of class as the time for SA. And what seems strange is that only one participant mentioned *Gaokao*, the most important summative assessment in China and largest-scale one in the world. It might be because that the participants tend to confine SA to classroom SA where they are more deeply involved.

The mainstream literatures’ specification of timing of SA is “at a particular time” (e.g. Harlen, 2004). This means that there is no requirement of the length of instructional time. It could be a class, a unit, half-semester, and one semester etc. What is more, what is implied by “at a particular time” might be that SA should be planned beforehand against FA that can be unplanned and can arise spontaneously as instruction is going on.

### *Instrument of collecting information*

**FA:** Elicitation of information is the first step of assessment process. As for the instruments of collecting information for FA, the participants’ answers show an obvious pattern of

order: portfolio is mostly frequently mentioned, followed by homework and classroom performance. Beside these three popular instruments, there is one participant who mentioned self-assessment checklists at the end of unit instruction. And there are some participants using tests as FA instrument such as small quizzes, monthly text, mid-term and end-of-term tests. The message here is that the participants do not separate FA from SA in their assessment practice, which coincides with the findings of some empirical studies (Black et al., 2003; Carless, 2011). What deserves special attention is that there is an inclination of not regarding above-mentioned instruments as tools of collecting information but as FA itself. Some participants even articulated that FA was just about recording various kinds of information about students with no need for further interpretation and use of it. This position goes against the mainstream FA literature. It has been clearly pointed out that portfolio itself does not constitute FA (Llosa, 2011), nor do frequent summative tests administered at regular intervals (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2006). What makes an assessment formative is the way that the collected information is interpreted and used. According to Wiliam (2011: 43): "An assessment functions formatively to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better or better founded, than the decisions they would have made in the absence of evidence."

**SA:** There is an obvious difference between FA and SA in terms of instrument as understood by teachers. The most frequently mentioned instruments (portfolio, homework and classroom performance) are almost completely absent in teachers'

discourse of SA. As for the instrument for SA, participants tend to link it with traditional tests laden with stakes. For example, one participant states clearly that: "SA refers to traditional test administered at end of semester or end of year." Specifically, the instruments mentioned by participants include: classroom instructional task, unit quiz, mid-semester tests, semester tests, graduation examination. Of these instruments, semester tests, end of semester test, and unit quiz are mentioned frequently, followed by classroom instructional task and graduation examination. Putting the SA and FA instruments together, we will find there are some overlapping between SA and FA instruments mentioned by the participants. The implication is that teachers don't separate them clearly.

This conception of FA and SA instruments is echoed by the mainstream assessment literature, which tends to encourage teachers to collect students learning evidence in various ways for decision-making, either summative or formative. However, that doesn't mean that all these instruments boast the same suitability for summative or formative purpose. The common knowledge is that standardized testing is more suitable for large-scale testing purpose and different types of instruments can have different degrees of potential formative power (McMillan, 2011).

### ***Use of Assessment Result***

**FA:** Feedback is the main form of formative use of assessment information (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black et al., 2003; Sadler, 1989). However, it is not perceived as such by most of the participants. Only 27 participants mentioned feedback in their response and most of them take feedback as collecting information from assessment of students for the purpose of adjusting instruction. In other words, the feedback

is not given to students but to teachers. There are only five participants who explicitly stated that feedback should be given to students and only one participant mentioning students giving feedback to themselves (self-assessment). What is more, no participant used "descriptive" or "detailed" to modify feedback required of FA. In comparison with the data about timing of FA, it is clear that timing is the feature of FA that figures more prominently in the minds of participants than feedback.

While it has been downplayed to a large extent in the participants' definitions, feedback has been consistently stressed as an important part of FA in assessment literature (Bloom et al, 1971; Heritage, Kim, Vendlinski, & Herman, 2009; Irons, 2008; McManus, 2008; Tunstall & Gipps, 1996). There are some scholars who even equal FA with feedback. For example, Harlen and James (1997: 369) claimed that "Formative assessment, therefore, is essentially feedback (Ramaprasad, 1983), both to the teacher and to the pupil about present understanding and skill development in order to determine the way forward."

**SA:** For summative assessment, the assessment information is mainly used to measure students' achievement of learning for grading, placement and/or accountability. But one participant mentioned the use of SA for feedback and improvement of instruction. The original statement goes like this: "SA is to use some testing methods to measure students' achievement for a certain period of time for the purpose of feedback and improvement of instruction in next stage or make decision on whether to move into next stage." This is similar to the idea of formative use of summative assessment (Black et al., 2003; Carless, 2011).

### *Relation between FA and SA*

The data shows that all participants believe that FA and SA are related to each other and a closer look reveals that they are related mainly in two ways: (1) FA enhances students' performance in SA. The reasoning behind this idea is that FA takes place in the process of learning and good process will result in good product; (2) FA can be aggregated into SA. This is an idea suggested by many participants in various wordings: "FA in different phases will constitute SA." "SA should take into consideration some evidence provided by FA." Some participants even suggested that FA could promote the quality of SA by saying "SA will be more scientific by including many FA."

The relationship between FA and SA has been a hot topic since the beginning of FA among assessment researchers. Generally speaking, there are two contrasting views about it. There is one group of scholars who think that FA and SA are in a competing relationship and incapable of co-existence. This view originated from Sadler (1989) who sees FA as means of intervention or regulation in learning while SA is essentially passive and don't normally have "immediate impact" on learning (Sadler 1989: 120).

William & Black (1996) and Roos & Hamilton (2005) also advocated the bipolarity and uneasy coexistence. Gipps (1990) even claimed that SA would ultimately overcome FA. Standing in contrast with this competition view is the complementary view, which has been supported by both theoretical reflection and empirical research. For example, Biggs (1998) called for an integration between FA and SA so as to bring about a powerful enhancement to learning. Many studies have reported combination of FA and SA in practice (Chetcuti et al. 2006; CERI, 2005; Dysthe & Engelsen, 2004; Harlen, 2004; Hutchinson &

Hayward, 2005; Kenowski, 2002).

The practice is usually carried out in two forms: formative use of SA and summative use of FA (Harlen, 2006).

Participants' conceptualization of FA and SA seems to be more in line with the complementary view than the competing view. However, they don't seem to be well informed about how to carry out them to the complementary effect. Teachers tend to believe FA can promote SA and it is not necessarily the case. FA can improve students' learning but may not enhance students' score in SA. Stobart (2008) has pointed out that there is a logic step between improved learning and improved scores in SA. What is more, participants believe that FA can be aggregated into SA. This reflects to some extent that they take FA as mini-summative assessment. As a matter of fact, FA and SA are different in many ways, especially in terms of validity and reliability (Bonner, 2013; Parkes, 2013). Therefore, aggregation of FA into SA entails some important and complicated issues such as change of criteria in interpreting assessment information (Harlen, 2006).

While to answer the question of how do secondary teachers in Chinese EFL classroom use assessment: FA and SA. The participants' responses are analyzed in a quantitative way in following dimensions: 1. Assessment tasks used with students; 2. Information given to students on assessment tasks; 3. Information on student self-assessment (SSA); 4. Information on student peer-assessment (SSA); 5. Assessment used for end- or mid-course grades; 6. Assessment assessing product and/or process. 7. Assessing for validation or for learning; 8. assessment providing useful feedback. The eight dimensions are chosen because they represent the common key assessment practices (Taras, 2008). Below are the detailed analysis and discussion.

### ***Assessment tasks used with students***

As shown in Table 1 below, 79.2% participants use FA task with students. Specifically, 78.9% use it in class and 54.6% use it for homework. 44.3% participants do FA and SA separately while there are 63.9% participants who combine FA and SA together.

It is good to see that a large proportion of participants use FA and more participants integrate SA and FA. This is in line with the findings of Black et al. (2003) that the teachers feel it is neither necessary nor logical to separate them. Yet, near half of secondary EFL teachers here separate them. However, there are a small part of participants who never use FA tasks with students, indicating that there is still a long way to go for promotion of FA practice in classroom in spite of the recent efforts at research and policy levels (Huang & Luo, 2014).

### ***Information given to students on assessment tasks***

As shown in Table 2, only 29.5% participants tell students that the task is FA task and only 25% participants explain how it is formative. More participants mark the work (57.3%) than grade it (47.9%). Most of the participants relate FA to the SA work (89.7%).

The participants don't seem to make use of FA quite well. Informing students of the purpose and features of FA is an important part of teachers' job for students need to have assessment literacy to be efficiently involved in assessment process (Stiggins, 2010). However, only a small proportion of participants do that. What is more, marking without a grade allow learners to focus on their work without the pressure of the grade has been proven to help students' learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Black et al., 2003). Yet, 47.9% participants grade FA. The good thing is a large majority of participants relate FA work to SA work, consistent with their responses to open questions.



**Table 1.** Assessment tasks used with students

Question 1-5	1. FA task used	2. In class	3. homework	4. For FA separate	5. SA FA and conflated
Yes	79.2%	78.9%	54.6%	44.3%	63.9%
No	20.8%	21.1%	45.4%	55.7%	36.1%

**Table 2** Information given to students on formative assessment tasks

Question 6-10	6. Tell students task is FA	7. Explain how task is FA	8. Is FA work marked?	9. Is FA work graded?	10. Is FA work related to SA.
Yes	29.5%	25%	57.3%	47.9%	89.7%
No	70.5%	75%	42.7%	52.1%	10.3%

**Table 3** Information on student self-assessment (SSA)

Question 11-14	11. Do students do SSA	12. Do you present SSA as FA	13. Do you present SSA as SA	14. Does SSA use both FA and SA
Yes	65%	60.4%	35.1%	42.3%
No	35%	39.6%	64.9%	57.7%

**Table 4.** Information on student peer-assessment (SPA)

Question 15-18	15. Do students do PSA	16. Do you present PSA as FA	17. Do you present PSA as SA	18. Does PSA use both FA and SA
Yes	76.0%	52.1%	27.4%	27.7%
No	24.0%	47.9%	72.6%	72.3%

**Table 5** Assessment used for end- or mid-course grades

Question 19-22	19. SA can be used for end of course grades	20. FA can be used for end of course grades	21. SA can be used for mid course grades	22. FA can be used for mid course grades
Yes	83.3%	59.4%	55.7%	72.2%
No	16.7%	40.6%	44.3%	27.8%

### **Information on student self-assessment (SSA)**

As shown in Table 3 below, 65% participants use self-assessment with their students. Specifically, 60.4% participants use self-assessment as FA while 35.1% present self-assessment as SA; however, 42.3% participants believe that self-assessment can be both SA and FA.

More participants take SSA as FA rather than SA. This is in line with popular view of putting students at the center for FA and SSA as main strategy of FA (Black et al. 2003; Carless, 2011; Wiliam, 2011). As a matter of fact, research community is divided on the concept of SSA. According to the generally accepted theoretical

frameworks of Sadler (1989 & 1998) and Scriven (1967), self-assessment is the student equivalent of SA, requiring the explicit step of providing feedback for it to become FA. On the other hand, Brown & Harris (2013) supports a wider concept of SSA, including descriptive, improvement-oriented formative dimension and quantitative evaluation-oriented summative dimension. The difference among the participants might be partly caused by this inconsistency in assessment literature.

### **Information on student peer-assessment**

As seen from Table 4 below, 76% participants use peer-assessment with their students. Specifically, 52.1% participants use self-assessment as a

part of FA while 27.4% present self-assessment as SA; however, 27.7% participants believe that peer-assessment can be both SA and FA.

SPA is used by more participants than SSA and more participants use it as FA than SA. This is understandable because in recent FA literature SPA is often listed as formative strategy (Careless 2001; Wiliam & Thompson 2008). But this is not the whole picture of SPA in assessment literature. According to Topping (2013), the function of peer assessment can be formative, summative or both. He suggests that in practice, teachers could start with peer assessment for formative purpose and then move to peer assessment for summative purpose as the students are very familiar with peer assessment and its reliability can be reassured.

#### ***Assessment used for end- or mid-course grades***

As shown in Table 5 below, 83.3% participants believe that SA can be used for end of course grades while 55.7% think it can be used for mid-course grades. 59.4% agree FA can be used for end of course grades while 72.2% believe that FA can be used for mid-course grades.

Much more participants (83.3%) believe SA can be used for end of course grades than for mid-course grades (55.7%). Similarly, less participants hold FA can be used for end of course grades than for mid-course grades. For the end of course grades, more participants choose SA than FA while for the mid-course grades, more participants choose FA over SA. It seems that the participants associate time interval with the use of FA and SA: SA tends to be used at longer time interval while FA at shorter interval. This is in line with participants' responses to open questions that show they regard timing as a distinguishing feature for FA and

SA. However, mainstream assessment literatures distinguish FA and SA mainly from its function or use rather than timing (Sadler, 1989; Wiliam, 2011).

#### ***Assessment assessing product and/or process***

As shown in Table 6, 81.2 % participants see SA as assessing a product while 28.1% participants see it as assessing a process. FA shows the opposite pattern: 88.5% see it as assessing process while 19.8% as assessing the product.

In general, the participants tend to link SA with final product and FA with process, which is consistent with participants' stress in definition of FA and SA on FA taking place during the instructional activity while SA at the end of various time stretches. However, the existing literature has shown clearly that both SA and FA can assess either process or product (Sadler, 1989 & 1998; Black & William, 2006; Taras, 2005, 2007 & 2008).

#### ***Assessment assessing for validation or for learning***

As shown in Table 7 below, 67% participants use SA for validation (grading) while 62.5% use it for learning. Only 23.2% participants use FA for validation (grading) while 96.9% for learning.

Almost the same number of participants uses SA for both validation and learning, showing that the participants have a comparatively strong faith in role of SA in promoting learning. This can be understood positively that the participants tend to tap the potential of SA for learning. Another positive thing is the participants' almost universal agreement that FA is for learning. What seems strange that 33% participants don't think SA is for validation, the major function of SA. It reflects that some participants are short of basic assessment literacy.

**Table 6.** Assessment assessing product and/or process

Question 23-26	23. SA assesses product	24. SA assesses process	25. FA assesses product	26. FA assesses process
Yes	81.2%	28.1%	19.8%	88.5%
No	12.8%	71.9%	80.2%	11.5%

**Table 7.** Assessment assessing for validation or for learning.

Question 27-30	27. SA assesses for validation	28. SA assesses for learning	29. FA assesses for validation	30. FA assesses for learning
Yes	67.0%	62.5%	23.2%	96.9%
No	33.0%	37.5%	76.8%	3.1%

**Table 8.** assessment provide useful feedback

Question 31-32	31. SA provides useful feedback	32. FA provides useful feedback	33. Feedback is corrective	34. Feedback is non- judgemental
Yes	84.4%	96.9%	82.3%	96.9%
No	15.6%	3.1%	17.7%	3.1%

### ***Assessments providing useful feedback***

As shown in Table 8 below, 84.4% participants think SA provides useful feedback while 96.9% participants hold that FA provides useful feedback. What is more, 82.3% see feedback as corrective and 96.9% as non-judgmental.

There appears an obvious difference between the participants' responses to open questions and close questions. In answers to open questions, 27 participants stated feedback for FA while only two participants mentioned feedback for SA. This shows at least the feedback is not the salient part in participants' conceptualization of assessment. It might also reflect that participants are better at good practice than formulating accurate definitions. As for the nature of feedback, most participants agree on its corrective and non-judgmental nature, thus dismissing grades as feedback leading to learning improvement.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study is aimed at finding out on how teachers, one of the major agents of FA, understand and use assessment: FA and SA. A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the participants' responses

has shown that: (1). The participants are not well informed in their understanding of assessment: FA, SA and their relationship. (2). They don't use assessment properly in many ways as suggested by assessment literature. In addition, the study has revealed the participants' specific misconception and misunderstanding of assessment and their varying strengths and weaknesses in different aspects of assessment practice. These findings highlight the importance and urgency of improving teacher's assessment literacy and can serve to illuminate and offer useful references for teacher training and education for secondary EFL teachers in relation to assessment in the Chinese context and hopefully in even wider context. However, the study is a small scale one of 98 participants and it is self-report one, which limits its representation and accuracy. It is hoped that in the future studies of larger-scale with observational component will be carried out to form a better picture of how teachers understand and use assessment.

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